

Geographic Review Panel 3 – American River/Eastside Tribes

Proposal number: 2001-D200

Short Proposal Title: Cosumnes/Mokelumne
Floodplain Acquisition

1. Applicability to CALFED ERP Goals and Implementation Plan and CVPIA priorities, and relevance to ERP and CVPIA priorities for your region. Yes, the proposed project is applicable to the protection and restoration goals of aquatic and terrestrial habitats identified by CALFED (goal 4) and the CVPIA, and is potentially relevant to CALFED goals 1 and 2 (recovery of at-risk species, and rehabilitation of ecosystem processes) if property acquisition and funding for the proposed second phase is successful.

2. Linkages/coordination with previously funded projects or other restoration activities in your region. Not well defined. This project proposes to build on work previously and extensively funded by CALFED and the CVPIA, but how this will be done remains unsaid.

On a related note, the proprietary data rights the project applicant requests arguably limits the application of potentially important lessons in floodplain ecosystem restoration and management to this and other TNC preserves (see additional comments, item 8).

3. Feasibility, especially the project's ability to move forward in a timely and successful manner. This is essentially a land acquisition project, and TNC has a long and successful history of land acquisition and stewardship here in California.

4. Qualifications of the applicants and others involved in implementing the proposed project. Highly qualified. Although the project principals and their backgrounds are not specified, TNC staff and their various partners (e.g. UC Davis, PWA) have already demonstrated success with the Cosumnes River project, and on many other land acquisition and stewardship projects in California (Sacramento River, Mill, Deer, and Battle Creeks).

5. Local involvement (including environmental compliance). Local involvement is well defined with broad community, state and federal agency support.

Environmental compliance is not applicable to the project phase for which funding is requested.

On a related note, TNC states that, as a non-governmental agency, they typically do not submit CEQA/NEPA documentation, and that they assume the funding agency will take the lead on any required documentation. If this cushy arrangement is true, it's inappropriate and should not be supported by CALFED or any other state or federal funding entity.

6. Cost. 3 million dollars, with less than 10 percent of the budget to support monitoring and overhead. Although the budget is exceptionally lean, there's not enough detail to assess whether the property will be successfully acquired. The project applicant notes that if only partial funding for the project is available, the project scope can be revised accordingly, by either scaling down the project and/or pursuing additional funding.

7. Cost sharing. None.

8. Additional comments. The TNC requests that data be held by the applicant and distributed only by formal request – via the Freedom of Information Act! Apparently CALFED has agreed to this on at least one other occasion (CALFED grant/project 97-NO3). While it's appropriate that the principal investigators be accorded certain privileges, there's no justification for withholding data from the public domain, particularly when the project applicant requests that CALFED, a publicly funded government entity, pick up 100 percent of the project costs.

Regional Ranking

Panel Ranking: High

Provide a brief explanation of your ranking: Panel felt that this was a poorly written proposal, but that the project itself was important enough to warrant a high ranking.

The lack of detail on property availability particularly limits meaningful evaluation of project success and the quality of the proposal in general. However, the Cosumnes and Mokelumne Rivers corridor represents one of the best opportunities for protection and restoration of riverine and riparian/floodplain ecosystems in an area of increasingly rapid development. If successfully acquired, the property will fill important gaps in the preserve, and protect an important and endangered ecosystem. Further, ongoing and proposed research will define and test important hydrologic-biologic relationships with potential application throughout the Central Valley.

Recommend the proposal be fully funded provided all scientific data associated with the project remains in the public domain.